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ABSTRACT

A child advocate, whether parent or designated member of an agency, must be a representative of the child's interests and must ascertain that schools are performing their functions as prescribed by legal, social, and moral standards. The person best situated to assume the role of child advocate in the schools is the school psychologist. Several models of child advocacy are applicable within the educational domain. In the "personal advocacy" model, the school psychologist remains independent of direct service delivery by connecting the child and family with appropriate agencies, and concentrates on enhancing the child's awareness of his/her needs, interests, and resources. In the "class advocacy" model, intervention acts to bring about changes desired by persons concerned with issues such as laws affecting children within the schools, and identification and improvement of services required by exceptional children. In each model, the school psychologist functions as the bridge between services and demands. (Author/CS)

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Models of Advocacy for the School Psychologist

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School professionals may function effectively as advocates to the extent that they are fully informed of the needs of the child and trained to understand what the best educational interests of the child may be.

Several models of advocacy have been developed by professionals, some of which could function within the educational domain.

The recent White House Conference on Children Forum 24 set forth extensive recommendations concerning child advocates and the development of a national system of child advocacy funded by Congress and that would recommend legislation. The report begins by defining children's rights as those granted in the preamble and, in addition, legally definable needs such as "moral guidance and reasonable limits on conduct" (p. 24-1). The need for a child advocate is felt because not all parents or existing agencies are adequately representing the interests of children as indicated by increases in dropout rates and crimes. Their position is that all children require an advocate because of legal disabilities and "immaturity."
This advocate should have experience and be skilled to serve whenever a child's health or liberty is threatened and when denied education, home, health care, property, rights or when subjected to forced treatment. These include

assertion of rights against and protection from family, other individuals or institutions. The proposed goals and objectives were summarized in five major points. The advocate's role is defined as a bridge or filler for the gaps existing in child service agencies and needs of a child; between family unit and child; between the school and child; and between courts, or other institutions and the child for the purpose of securing fulfillment of rights, needs, and protection. The advocate does not replace any existing member or agency already providing child service. The advocate brings agencies' services together for the best interests of the child or to connect the child with the appropriate agencies. The advocate is a harmonizer for conflict, provider for needs, and evaluator for providing quality services. They stress the importance of the need of an independent advocate responsible only to children and their specific needs and interests and not to other governing bodies.

Tracy (1973) provided another perspective and definition of advocacy for handicapped children. He stated there has been an institutional breakdown as a result of faults in caretakers in the providing of services for handicapped children. Caretakers have largely been coersive behavior managers and supervisors.

The core of his position rests on the belief that the behavioral sciences' logical deductive methodology of

generating knowledge is inappropriate for generating models of delivery of care to handicapped children. The nature of the deductive framework is to analyze and break apart a given area which is antithetical to the primary caretaker function of synthesis. The goals of a caretaker are to facilitate the realization of potential and capabilities and facilitate integration of these as a unified whole rather than a person broken down into disabilities or handicaps. Present assessment and treatment methods violate the basic rights of equal protection and due process respectively. Diagnosis as assessment breaks a handicapped child into separate fragments with appropriate labels. It does not generate constructive models for treatment. The caregiver "assesses instead of diagnoses the situation and provides a number of alternatives rather than a treatment" (p. 6). The caretaker role must become one of creating new environments in which the individual is allowed a different set of interactions and experiences. After creating new environments, the caretaker's role is to bring the many facets of the individual, including the disability, into a functioning whole. The caretaker advocates "self-actualization of the individual for the realization of his potential" (p. 3). Tracy also replaced the phrase caretaker with caregiver to emphasize not the taking of control of the handicapped's behavior, but the giving of control over

care and of the advocate's function to the individual. The handicapped child is allowed due process in the choosing among alternative programs and environments and has equal protection by the caregiver giving control of the care process to the child. The caregiver, in order to work in such a model, must have skills in conceptualization and implementation of learning environments to achieve the objectives he needs to obtain. Using an ecological perspective, the caregiver structures his responses according to his objectives with an awareness of the consequences of his responses on the communication exchanged between himself and the child. Each, then, becomes an equal contributor through the communication system with the caregiver advocating a functional communication pattern. The handicap itself then becomes the product of the exchange, a miscommunication rather than an attribute of the child. Tracy stresses the fact that persons have both physical and mental handicaps. It is the individual caregiver's interaction which describes handicapping situations. When structuring the exchange pattern and when teaching, clear and immedicate feedback is critical. The handicapped child also must be also to determine his interests, own needs and resources in order to be a full participant in the learning process. A contract is formed between the caregiver and child that is equal in sharing the responsibility for outcomes. In this manner both remain autonomous.

The conceptualization of advocacy in this framework is one of a spokesman for the child and in facilitating integration of the child's whole potential while constantly maintaining the child's input in the program, on a basis that is equal to that of the advocate.

Another perspective on advocacy was presented at a national conference in 1976 that discussed Public Law 94-103, The Developmentally Disabled Assistance and Bill of Rights Act. This conference focused on section 113 of the Developmentally Disabled Act (DD) which mandates the creation of a mechanism to protect rights of DD persons. In order to receive funds, states had to develop programs for the protection and advocacy of legal rights of DD persons by 1977. The conference recommended that the DD office of HEW define the minimum components of an advocacy system and that these components should include the interrelated areas of personal or citizen advocacy, systems advocacy and legal advocacy (Villing, 1976).

Personal or citizen advocacy is defined as a one-to-one relationship between a trained volunteer designated as an advocate and mentally retarded or otherwise DD person known as a protege (Addison, 1976). The citizen advocacy concept was designed by Wolfensberger to assist disabled children and adults when their rights were not appropriately safeguarded or needs not adequately met by existing service systems. In this relationship the advocate defends the

rights and interests of the protege and provides practical assistance and/or emotional reinforcement. Defending rights and interests is defined as speaking on behalf of a protege to prevent or eliminate situations of abuse or exploitation. An example is helping a protege to locate and use community-based programs, services and facilities. Citizen advocacy requires the extablishment of a local program that is governed by an advisory committee composed of professionals from a variety of disciplines (e.g., law, psychology and social work), parents, consumers, and other local represnetatives. There is a paid coordinator whose function is to identify proteges, assess their needs and to recruit, select and train advocates. Proteges are then matched with appropriate advocates, by the coordinator, in a supportive one-to-one relationship. An important aspect of a citizen advocacy program is that it remain independent from service delivery systems and agencies.

Systems change advocacy involves a model similar to one outlined above. Intervention in this model is defined as bringing about changes that remedy problems not just for one person, but all persons in the present and future who may have similar problems (Moore, 1976).

Class advocacy within this model includes the following approaches: (1) initiating, influencing and monitoring legislation affecting the developmentally disabled; (2) using

systems analysis approach, identifying services needed and/or changes sought in service delivery system; (3) initiating, influencing and assisting in the development of new services and the improvement and expansion of existing services; (4) promoting the active involvement of consumers in planning, policy making and monitoring of services at state, county and local levels; (5) providing technical assistance to extablished consumer action groups; and (6) using community organization processes to develop better communication and cooperation among agencies, organizations, and consumer groups involved in community planning.

Another aspect of the systems change advocacy model involves class advocacy. The class advocacy approach includes: (1) providing information, training and technical assistance to case management to expand the advocacy role and function; (2) conducting an ombudsman program for a disabled person by following the grievance through investigation, interceding or initiating action; and (3) locating appropriate legal services for individuals or groups of consumers and providing information that will assist legal service professionals in negotiation or litigation.

Legal advocacy involves the use of attorneys in representation in case and class action suits. Lawyers are

becoming more involved in representing the disabled as increasingly more laws are passed in this domain. Haggarty (1976) feels that the legal realm is primarily concerned with defining terms including clearly establishing the definition of due process within an education setting.

A child advocate, whether parent or designated member of an agency, must be a representative of the child's interests and assume that schools are performing their function as prescribed by legal, social and moral concerns. In the instance of special services within the schools, the person situated to assume the function of child advocate is the school psychologist.

The role of a school psychologist as a problem solver within a school has a set of responsibilities on the basis of new litigation and attitudes towards children's rights. The school psychologist takes on the role of advocate for individual students and students groups at all levels, whether it be the process of appropriate diagnosis and assessment or securing the services prescribed in the Washington Report (1970). It is the school psychologist's responsibility to bridge the gap between the child and school by securing fulfillment of his/her needs, rights and protection. As described in the personal advocacy model, the school psychologist remains independent of direct service delivery by connecting the child with the

appropriate individual, situation or agency that delivers the needed service. As with Tracy's model of caregiving advocacy mentioned above, the school psychologist is responsible for establishing an awareness in the child of his/her needs, interests and resources in order to bring about a functional communication pattern.

Another model suited to a school psychologist is the class advocacy approach within the systems change advocacy model. Intervention from this model serves to bring about change profitable to a group of individuals with similar problems considering system constraints. Among these components previously mentioned are: (1) an awareness of laws affecting children within schools; (2) identifying services needed; and (3) affecting change in services provided, including expansion, improvement and creation of new ones.

The school psychologist must be prepared to assure the needs of children concerned, in conjunction with the demands of the institution and provide alternatives for resolving descrepancies between conflicting needs and demands. Where conflict exists, it is the responsibility of the advocate to bring the needs and rights of those concerned to the awareness of school, parents and the community in general.

It is also the school psychologist's responsibility to

see that due process considerations, as defined by law, are carried out in the identification and placement of exceptional children.

Summary

Because of the increased concern of appropriate protection and representation of children within schools today, a fastly growing role for a school psychologist is that of an advocate. The courts have thus far upheld the doctrine of en loco parentis requiring adult representation for children's interests. The courts have further defined that children are allowed procedural and legal safeguards that are afforded to adults in the constitution. Other school officials concerned with delivery of services can rely upon the school psychologist as the assessor of needs and creator of solutions and bridge between services and demands.

Several models outlined above have been developed by professionals which help to further define the role and responsibilities of such an advocate within a school setting.

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